The ‘Flexible’ Immigrant: Household strategies and the labour market

Gillian Creese, University of British Columbia
Isabel Dyck, Queen Mary, University of London
Arlene T. McLaren, Simon Fraser University

11th International Metropolis Conference, Lisbon
2-6 October, 2006
Overview

- Setting the stage – the ‘flexible’ immigrant
- Research methodology
- Constructing ‘flexibility’
  - Job-finding and re-skilling
  - Social and familial networks
  - Children’s futures
  - Belonging and citizenship
- Conclusions - gender and policy implications
The flexible immigrant and the ‘absent’ family

- Human capital discourse
- And the family?
- Household, gender and flexibility
Research Methodology

- Longitudinal study: 5 years
- Cross-comparison of neighbourhoods
- Qualitative strategies
  - individual and shared experiences
  - participating households as ‘ideal’ immigrants
## Cases – four households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Marcos (EV)</th>
<th>Khalili (TC)</th>
<th>Naidu (EV)</th>
<th>Lau (TC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrival date</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1996 on</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Education</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Engineer BA</td>
<td>Masters degree</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English fluency</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Some difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household type</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Extended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. in family</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2-7</td>
<td>7-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EV – East Vancouver   TC - Tri-Cities
Job-seeking and re-skilling

- Labour market conditions and constraints on flexibility
  - Increasingly polarized labour market in late 1990s economic restructuring
  - Racialized and gendered labour market inequalities
  - Immigrants – lack of recognition of credentials, de-skilling, unemployment, lack of access to good jobs

- Multiple job-seeking strategies and barriers
  - Individual strategies within broader household goals
Social and familial networks

- Used variously over time
  - initial settlement
  - finding employment
  - attachment to place, ‘belonging’

- Becoming citizens … work, family life, places of ‘belonging’
Children’s futures: immigration as a family affair

- Intertwining children’s needs, occupational and training opportunities
- Community involvement, attachment to neighbourhood and ‘belonging’
Conclusions: the household and the constitution of ‘flexibility’

- Flexibility of family support